

INTL 8405 Comparative Politics & Digital Media*

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Department of International Affairs

The University of Georgia

Location: Candler Hall 117

Class Time: Thursdays, 3:55-6:45 pm

Office: 322 Candler Hall

Office Hours: By appointment

Course Description

This seminar critically examines the central role of digital media in today's world by engaging a selection of key themes at the conjunction of comparative politics and digital media. The course will first familiarize you with digital media and its development across the globe by examining the history, key concepts and theories, and methodological approaches related to the rise of digital media. We will examine the debates about the political implications of digital media, particularly its impact on state-society relations in both democratic and authoritarian regimes. For instance, we will cover themes like digital media and electoral politics, digital media and social activism, digital media and revolutions, digital media and e-government & governance, as well as cyber security and cyber warfare. You will also have the opportunity to include any theme that you are particularly interested in by writing and presenting a research paper on a topic of your selection. I expect to have one-on-one meetings with you to help with your project.

Course Materials:

The course assigns several books, which you need to purchase, rent or borrow from the library. Please note that many of the books are available online or in e-version from UGA library. ***You are also recommended to read on traditional media systems and politics. Approach the instructor for suggestions.***

***** If you have a disability and require reasonable classroom accommodations, please see me after class. *****

Course Requirements and Grading Criteria

A 93-100	A- 90-92	B+ 87-89	B 83-86	B- 80-82
C+ 77-79	C 73-76	C- 70-72	D 60-69	F 0-59

Participation (20%) Please attend classes regularly. Please read and reflect upon assigned readings as well as the reading responses from your classmates (see below). During the sessions, please engage in discussion actively. Alternative forms of participation will also be recognized.

Reading Responses (20 %) Write responses (3-4 pages, double spaced) to the assigned readings for the weeks of your choice and email them to the class two days before the relevant seminar (Tuesday noon if you need a firm deadline). The reading responses may take a variety of forms but should include basic ideas and arguments of the readings, and more importantly your own questions, comments, and reflections. You are also welcome to draw on materials outside assigned readings.

Book Review (20%) Write a book review of one or more books related to the course. In the essay, you shall

* The syllabus is a general plan for the course; updates and revisions may be necessary.

summarize the argument, compare/contrast the book to course readings and other studies, and offer your own critique. Focus on analysis/critique and develop one coherent theme rather than providing a “laundry list” of summary.

Research Paper (40%) Write a paper on a topic of your choice. The paper should start with an empirical or theoretical puzzle, present relevant hypotheses based on existing literature, and test your hypotheses with empirical data. You are encouraged to employ innovative research methods such as digital ethnography, computer-aided content analysis, and the survey experiment. You can produce a full-fledged research paper or a solid research design. You are expected to present your project for feedback from the class before submitting the final paper. **Please email your proposal or paper to the class beforehand and include your major concerns and the types of comments and suggestions you are seeking.**

Note: If you are submitting the same paper to two or more courses, please make sure that the paper meets the expectations of each course. Failing to do so may result in lower grades from both/all courses.

Academic Honesty:

As a University of Georgia student, you have agreed to abide by the University’s academic honesty policy, “A Culture of Honesty,” and the Student Honor Code. All academic work must meet the standards described in “A Culture of Honesty” found at: www.uga.edu/honesty. Lack of knowledge of the academic honesty policy is not a reasonable explanation for a violation. Questions related to course assignments and the academic honesty policy should be directed to the instructor.

Mental Health and Wellness Resources:

- If you or someone you know needs assistance, you are encouraged to contact Student Care and Outreach in the Division of Student Affairs at 706-542-7774 or visit <https://sco.uga.edu/>. They will help you navigate any difficult circumstances you may be facing by connecting you with the appropriate resources or services.
- UGA has several resources for a student seeking mental health services (<https://www.uhs.uga.edu/bewelluga/bewelluga>) or crisis support (<https://www.uhs.uga.edu/info/emergencies>).
- If you need help managing stress anxiety, relationships, etc., please visit BeWellUGA (<https://www.uhs.uga.edu/bewelluga/bewelluga>) for a list of FREE workshops, classes, mentoring, and health coaching led by licensed clinicians and health educators in the University Health Center.
- Additional resources can be accessed through the UGA App.

Additional Ground Rules and Resources:

- On preferred names/pronouns. “Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, culture, religion, politics, sexual orientation, gender, gender variance, and nationalities. Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student’s legal name. I am eager to address you by your preferred name and/or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records.”

- Prohibition on recording lectures. “In the absence of written authorization from the UGA Disability Resource Center, students may not make a visual or audio recording of any aspect of this course. Students who have a recording accommodation agree in writing that they:
 - Will use the records only for personal academic use during the specific course.
 - Understand that faculty members have copyright interest in their class lectures and that they agree not to infringe on this right in any way.
 - Understand that the faculty member and students in the class have privacy rights and agree not to violate those rights by using recordings for any reason other than their own personal study.
 - Will not release, digitally upload, broadcast, transcribe, or otherwise share all or any part of the recordings. They also agree that they will not profit financially and will not allow others to benefit personally or financially from lecture recordings or other course materials.
 - Will erase/delete all recordings at the end of the semester.
 - Understand that violation of these terms may subject them to discipline under the Student Code of Conduct or subject them to liability under copyright laws.”

Course AI Policy

You are allowed to explore the use of generative artificial intelligence (GAI) tools for your assignments when proper, but use of GAI tools should be limited to providing support as you develop your thinking and knowledge base. In addition, there are some general rules to follow:

- Please note that you may not represent output generated by a GAI tool as your own work. Any such use of GAI output must be appropriately cited or disclosed, including quotation marks and in-line citations for direct quotes. Including anything you did not write in your assignment without proper citation will be treated as an academic misconduct case. Suspected unauthorized assistance, plagiarism, or other violations of UGA’s “A Culture of Honesty,” will be reported to the Office of Academic Honesty. For full details on how to properly cite AI-generated work, please see the APA Style article, [How to Cite ChatGPT](#), for instance.
- If you are unsure where the line is between collaborating with GAI and copying from GAI, I recommend that you do not have your assignment and the GAI tool open on your device at the same time. Instead, take notes in your own words while you interact with the GAI tool, then use your notes to remind you of what you’ve learned and to inform your work. Never copy output from GAI tools into your assignment. Instead, use your interaction with the tool as a learning experience, then close the interaction down, open your assignment, and let your assignment reflect your improved understanding. (Sidenote: This advice extends to AI assistants that are directly integrated into a composition environment or grammar modulation tool.)
- Finally, GAI is highly vulnerable to inaccuracy and bias. You should assume GAI output is wrong unless you either know the answer or can verify it with another source. It is your responsibility to assess the validity and applicability of any GAI output used.

CLASS SCHEDULE

WEEK 1 (August 14): Welcome! Course Introduction

- * Merrill Morris and Christine Ogan, "The Internet as Mass Medium," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 1:4 (1996).

WEEK 2 (August 21) Digital Media & Web Spirits

- * Tim Berners-Lee, “Long Live the Web: A Call for Continued Open Standards and Neutrality,” *Scientific American Magazine* (December 2010), 80-85.
- * Danah Boyd and Nicole Ellison, “Social Network Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship,” *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 13:1 (2007), 210–230.
- * Tim Wu and Christopher Yoo, “Keeping the Internet Neutral?: Tim Wu and Christopher Yoo Debate” *Federal Communications Law Journal* 59:3 (2007), 575-592.
- * John Perry Barlow, “[A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace](#),” EFF, Feb. 8, 1996.
- * Julia Pohle and Thorsten Thiel, “Digital Sovereignty.” *Internet Policy Review*, 9:4 (2020), 1–19.
- * Maryanne Kelton et al., “Virtual Sovereignty? Private Internet Capital, Digital Platforms and Infrastructural Power in the United States.” *International Affairs*, 98:6 (2022), 1977-99.

Suggested: Jose van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity* (Oxford U Press, 2013).

Discussants:

1)	2)	3)
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WEEK 3 (August 28) Not Everyone is Born Equal in Digital Era

- * Helen V. Milner, “The Digital Divide: The Role of Political Institutions in Technology Diffusion,” *Comparative Political Studies*, 39:2 (2006), 176-199.
- * Kelley Cotter and Bianca C. Reisdorf, “Algorithmic Knowledge Gaps: A New Dimension of (Digital) Inequality.” *International Journal of Communication*, 14 (2020), 745-65.
- * Laura Robinson et al. “Digital Inequalities and Why They Matter,” *Information Communication and Society*, 18:5 (2015), 569-582.
- * Richard Heeks, “Digital Inequality beyond the Digital Divide: Conceptualizing Adverse Digital Incorporation in the Global South,” *Information Technology for Development*, 28:4 (2022), 688-704.

Suggested: Virginia Eubanks, *Automating Inequality: How High-Tech Tools Profile, Police, and Punish the Poor* (St. Martin's Press, 2017); Cathy O'Neil, *Weapons of Math Destruction: How Big Data Increases Inequality and Threatens Democracy* (Crown, 2016).

Discussants: 1) 2) 3)

WEEK 4 (September 4) Digital Media and E-Governance

- * Beth Simone Noveck, "Wiki-Government: How open-source technology can make government decision-making more expert and more democratic," *Democracy Journal* 7 (2008), 31-43.

- * Y. N. Chen, H. M. Chen, W. Huang, and R. K.H. Ching, “E-Government Strategies in Developed and Developing Countries: An Implementation Framework and Case Study,” *Journal of Global Information Management* 24:1 (2006), 23-46.
- * Yuen Yuen Ang, “Authoritarian Restraints on Online Activism Revisited: Why ‘I-Paid-A-Bribe’ Worked in India but Failed in China,” *Comparative Politics* 47:1 (2014): 21–40.
- * Kaiping Zhang, Jinxu Zhao, and Tianguang Meng, “Governing China in Digit: A Framework for Assessing the Development of Digital Government in 101 Chinese Municipalities,” *China Review* 24:3 (2024): 207–40.
- Discussants: 1) 2) 3)

WEEK 6 (September 18) Digital Media & Democracy, and Electoral Politics

WEEK 7 (September 25) Misinformation, Disinformation, and Democracy

WEEK 8 (October 2) Digital Surveillance in Democracies

Glenn Greenwald, *No Place to Hide: Edward Snowden, the NSA, and the U.S. Surveillance State* (Picador, 2015).

- * Yochai Benkler, “A Free Irresponsible Press” *Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review* 46:2 (2011), 311-397.

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WEEK 9 (October 9) The Power of Digital Media and Mobilization

- * Clay Shirky, “The Political Power of Social Media,” *Foreign Affairs* (Jan. 2011), 28-41.
- * Malcolm Gladwell, “Small Change: Why the Revolution Will Not Be Tweeted,” *New Yorker* (October 4, 2010).
- * Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg, “The Logic of Connective Action: Digital Media and the Personalization of Contentious Politics,” *Information, Communication and Society* 15:5(2012), 739-768.
- * Alasdair Roberts, “Why the Occupy Movement Failed,” *Public Administration Review* 72:5 (2012), 754-762.
- * Robert Brym et al., “Social Media in the 2011 Egyptian Uprising,” *The British Journal of Sociology*, 65:2 (2014), 266–292.

Suggested: # Philip N. Howard and Muzammil M. Hussain, *Democracy's Fourth Wave? Digital Media and the Arab Spring* (Oxford University Press, 2013). [I found an E-version online](#)

Discussants: 1) 2) 3)

WEEK 10 (October 16) Digital Media and High-Capacity Autocracies (China Case)

- * Ya-Wen Lei, “The Political Consequences of the Rise of the Internet: Political Beliefs and Practices of Chinese Netizens.” *Political Communication*, 28:3 (2011), 291–322.
- * Jonathan Hassid, “Safety Valve or Pressure Cooker? Blogs in Chinese Political Life,” *Journal of Communications* 62 (2012), 212-230.
- * Seva Gunitsky, “Corrupting the Cyber-Commons: Social Media as a Tool of Autocratic Stability,” *Perspectives on Politics*, 13:1 (2015), 42–54.
- * Gary King, Jennifer Pan and Margaret Roberts, “How Censorship in China Allows Government Criticism but Silences Collective Expression,” *American Political Science Review* (May 2013), 1-18.
- * Gary King et al., “How the Chinese Government Fabricates Social Media Posts for Strategic Distraction, Not Engaged Argument,” *American Political Science Review*, 111: 3 (2017), 484–501.
- * Genia Kostka, “China’s Social Credit Systems and Public Opinion: Explaining High Levels of Approval,” *New Media & Society*, 21: 7 (2019), 1565–1593.
- * Rachel Stern et al., “Automating Fairness? Artificial Intelligence in the Chinese Court,” *Columbia Journal of Transnational Law*, 59 (2021), 515–53.

Suggested: # Rongbin Han, *Contesting Cyberspace in China* (Columbia University Press, 2018).

Discussants: 1) 2) 3)

WEEK 11 (October 23) Digital Politics across Boundaries: Cyber Terrorism and Cyber War

Gabriel Weimann, *Terrorism in Cyberspace: The Next Generation* (Columbia University Press, 2015). [E-version available from UGA library]

- * Emily Parker, “Hack Job: How America Invented Cyberwar,” *Foreign Affairs* May/June (2017).

Discussants: 1) 2) 3)

WEEK 12 (October 30) Digital Media and Global Power Competition

Satoru Mori, "US Technological Competition with China: The Military, Industrial and Digital Network Dimensions," *Asia-Pacific Review* 26:1(2019), 77–120.

Andrea Gilli & Mauro Gilli, "Why China Has Not Caught Up Yet," *International Security* 43:3 (2019), 141-189.

The Economist, “China has become a scientific superpower,” *The Economist*, June 12, 2024.

Hong Liu & Chunzi Miao, "Digital geopolitics in a VUCA world," *Global Policy* 15:S6 (2024), 67-83.

Lizhi Liu, "The Rise of Data Politics: Digital China and the World," *Studies in Comparative International Development* 56 (2021), 45-67.

Martin Beraja et al, "Exporting the Surveillance State via Trade in AI," *NBER Working Paper No. w31676*
(September 2023), <https://www.nber.org/papers/w31676>

Discussants: 1) 2) 3)

WEEK 13 (November 6) Digital Future?

- * Samantha Cole, “[There is No Tech Solution to Deepfakes](#),” Motherboard (August 14, 2018).
- * Daniel Kokotajlo, Scott Alexander, Thomas Larsen, Eli Lifland, Romeo Dean, AI 2027 (April 3, 2025). <https://ai-2027.com/>
- * Xiao Qiang, “The Road to Digital Unfreedom,” *Journal of Democracy* 30:1 (2019), 53-67.
- * Shoshana Zuboff, “Big other: surveillance capitalism and the prospects of an information civilization,” *Journal of Information Technology* (2015) 30, 75–89.
- * Jack Goldsmith & Andrew K. Woods, “[Internet Speech Will Never Go Back to Normal](#),” *The Atlantic*, April 2020.

[illegible]

WEEK 14 (November 13) Digital Media and Research Methods Innovation

- * Zeynep Tufekci, “Engineering the Public: Big Data, Surveillance and Computational Politics,” *First Monday* 19: 7 (2014).
- * Justin Grimmer, “We’re All Social Scientists Now: How Big Data, Machine Learning, and Causal Inference Work Together,” *PS: Political Science & Politics* 48:1 (2015), 80-83.

- * Kate Crawford, Kate Miltner, and Mary Gray, “Critiquing Big Data: Politics, Ethics, Epistemology,” *International Journal of Communication* 8 (2014), 1663-1672.
- * Michael Lieberman, “Visualizing Big Data: Social Network Analysis,” CASRO Digital Research Conference, San Antonio, Texas (March 11-12, 2014).
- * Angela Cora Garcia, Alecea I. Standlee, Jennifer Bechhoff, and Yan Cui, “Ethnographic Approaches to the Internet and Computer-Mediated Communication,” *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 38: 1 (2009), 52-84.
- * Byron Reeves et al., “Screenomics: A Framework to Capture and Analyze Personal Life Experiences and the Ways That Technology Shapes Them,” *Human-Computer Interaction*, 36:2 (2021), 150–201.

WEEK 15 (November 20) Prepare for final paper project